

## **Read Through the Bible**

**Week 7, February 15<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>**

**Readings:** Leviticus 18 – Numbers 4 and Matthew 27:32 – Mark 3:35

### **Introduction to Mark**

**Eugene Peterson, *The Message***

Mark wastes no time in getting down to business—a single-sentence introduction, and not a digression to be found from beginning to end. An event has taken place that radically changes the way we look at and experience the world, and he can't wait to tell us about it. There's an air of breathless excitement in nearly every sentence he writes. The sooner we get the message, the better off we'll be, for the message is good, incredibly good: God is here, and he's on our side.

The bare announcement that God exists doesn't particularly qualify as news. Most people in most centuries have believed in the existence of God or gods. It may well be, in fact, that human beings in aggregate and through the centuries have given more attention and concern to divinity than to all their other concerns put together—food, housing, clothing, pleasure, work, family, whatever.

But that God is here right now, and on our side, actively seeking to help us in the way we most need help—this qualifies as news. For, common as belief in God is, there is also an enormous amount of guesswork and gossip surrounding the subject, which results in runaway superstition, anxiety, and exploitation. So Mark, understandably, is in a hurry to tell us what happened in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—the Event that reveals the truth of God to us, so that we can live in reality and not illusion. He doesn't want us to waste a minute of these precious lives of ours ignorant of this most practical of all matters—that God is passionate to save us.

### **Reflections and Thoughts**

**By Joan Gustafson**

God gives us moral precepts, or rules by which we are to live our lives in Leviticus. The best way for us to avoid gross sin is by adhering to God's ordinances. History shows our inability to consistently succeed at this, if at all. However, we are reminded that no matter how we fail, we have the opportunity to start each day new, cleansed and close to God. Each new start actually begins at sunset.

We've been given a tradition of feasts or celebrations to help us remember Jesus' earthly mission; His 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> comings. Jesus never took a break from being the never ending light of the world. We are asked to follow his tireless example. How can we do that? By being supplied with oil (the Holy Spirit) and trimming our wicks (training through trial) we have the ability to obey even when difficult. By being willing to obey God, even when it doesn't make sense, we can trust He will provide our every need.

In Numbers the people of God order themselves to enter the promise land. Although we are all equally consecrated to God, we have different jobs to perform. Thankfully God

does not seek uniformity in our skills, talents and offerings. Rather, He assigns us tasks based upon the strengths and skills He has given us. Don't ever consider yourself "less than" based on externals. God has crafted you to fill a specific need in His plan.

Matthew describes the parade leading to the crucifixion. A bystander is drafted to carry the cross for Jesus. We can look back at this and judge that a disciple should have been there to help Jesus. They failed to have the courage to help Jesus. God's assigned work for us will not always be pleasant, but the more pleasant jobs actually forfeit our right to fulfill our assignment.

It's interesting to note that neither outward piety nor oppression necessarily guarantees a heart obedient to God. The chief priests, robbers and passers by all heaped insults upon Jesus. The taunters all test Jesus, by implying He can have their allegiances if he will forsake the Father's way of getting it. Jesus doesn't take the bait of course and it's the ultimate example for us to remember our assigned course of action, hard as it may be.

Jesus died wounded, but trusting His Father. Do we trust? When we are so convinced of God's will that we forsake the world's offerings to perform God's assignment, we demonstrate our discipleship of the One who redeemed us at the cost of his own life. With each sunset we have the opportunity to commit anew to this assignment.

The Risen Christ represents the new and eternal life for believers. The power of the gospel transcends cultural restrictions and the power of the Holy Spirit fuels us to righteous action no matter the difficulty.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you renew your commitment to follow Jesus' example with each new day?
2. Describe a recent wick trimming you've experienced. What spiritual gift did you receive?
3. Do you remember a time that you chose to follow God's precepts when it didn't make sense? What need did He fill through that experience?
4. What feelings do you experience when you witness the God-given talents and gifts of others? Do you share a connection with them?
5. What do you believe is your assigned task from God? Will that task change over your lifetime?
6. It's easy to feel like a complete failure when comparing ourselves to the life example of Jesus. What advice would you give a new Christian just beginning their journey, to remember when they feel utterly worthless?